

AN ELUSIVE PAIR OF SCREECH OWLS.

For four years I have tried to get eggs from a pair of the Screech Owls which nest in the Connecticut River meadows, half-a-mile from here. They have been unusually sensitive over my intrusions, I think, and have escaped with only slight sacrifice until this year.

The woods back from the river are full of hollow maple trees, many of which are ideal nesting places for the little Scops. On April 26, 1894, the water being about fifteen feet above summer level, I was rowing through the woods after Crow's nests, and noticed an almost perfect Owl's hole, in the under side of a sloping limb of a soft maple, about ten feet above the water. To test it I bumped the boat rather sharply against the trunk, and instantly, as if I had touched a spring on a jack-in-the-box, a beautiful grey Scops appeared, seated in the mouth of the hole, with ear tufts erect, snapping beak, and eyes like full moons. I, of course, started up the tree, and had climbed hardly half way when "grey ears" left the hole, and was quickly followed by a mate of the red phase. The first flew off out of sight, but the red one, the mother I fancy, perched on a limb about twenty feet away. She (?) showed *no* ear tufts. About two feet down in the hole were two blind, white little owlets, two freshly killed "deer mice," and three eggs, one pipped. On holding this to my ear I could plainly hear the chick squeaking inside.

I had no opportunity to watch the brood, and hoped for better luck next year, but that fall honey bees claimed the hole, and filled it with comb. In 1895, with that hole of course out of the question, I searched every other place I could find, but did not locate the pair until on June 2 I found three grey youngsters sitting outside a hole I had overlooked. The mother was near by, and grew very angry when I shook down one of her little ones from a sapling to which he had fluttered.

Next year, April, 7, 1896, I found a red bird in a very shallow hole in the verticle trunk of a maple, not 1000 feet from the old bee-tree. I hammered on the trunk without flushing her, and after climbing the fifteen feet up from the water to the hole, put my fingers under her and counted the three eggs. I believe she did wink one eye, but she made no attempt to grip my fingers, nor snapped her bill as I have had them do in the roosting holes. Nevertheless, she deserted the eggs, and my brother took them on April 11, cold, and showing only a slight trace of incubation. On the 25th a hole had been dug three inches deep in the rotten wood lining of the nest, probably by squirrels or mice. The next

winter the hole was used by both squirrels and owls, as I found the signs of both on the ice beneath it.

In 1897 I lost the birds entirely, but think it possible that they raised a brood in the 1895 tree.

This year my brother found a grey bird roosting within 200 feet of this (1895) hole. He was sitting up in the mouth of the hollow limb so that his head and horns showed from below, but dropped back when the tree was thumped. On April 12 I visited all the old holes, first hammering the trunks, and then climbing, and repeated the experience of 1896 to the letter, finding a red bird which would not flush nor wake up at all, in the same shallow hole. I left her two fresh eggs till the 23d, but she again deserted.

The 1895 hole was the last one visited—at 7 P. M. Though we rowed up quietly the bird must have flown before we reached the tree, for none flushed. On climbing up I found the limb so rotten that I decided to destroy it. Imagine my surprise when on opening the hole I found six eggs, still warm. The embryos were well formed. (It had been an early season, with all the first nesters ahead of time.) No bird came about, though I was in the tree for ten minutes. She may have left the nest for a few minutes of exercise at twilight.

Is it the usual rule for an owl to desert her nest as promptly as one of these did?

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EDITORIAL.

Our fellow member, Lieut. John W. Daniel, Jr., whose expected trip to Puerto Rico was interrupted by the peace protocol, now expects to be ordered to Cienfuegos, Cuba, and he promises to acquaint us with his experiences and researches while there. The present circumstances will give an added interest to any thing that the unfortunate island may give us.

We again find ourselves in the midst of a period of stagnation so far as field study of the birds is concerned. It is so for some of us, at least. The question naturally arises, What can be done until the birds return again? There is always one thing that can be done which should become our most pleasant and profitable duty; and that is to review the note-book of the past season, comparing it with previous ones with a